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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Precarious Calm in Mogadishu Following Ethiopian Withdrawal

REF: 08 Nairobi 2755

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Following the eagerly awaited withdrawal by Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) from Mogadishu, to date, there has been no intense fighting in Mogadishu by al-Shabaab or among rival armed groups. The calm is attributable to Mogadishu's complex clan dynamic, public pressure, and intense lobbying by elders, religious leaders, and Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) and Transitional Federal Government (TFG) officials to prevent various armed groups from renewing conflict. TFG militia moved to occupy one abandoned ENDF position, while various armed factions directly or loosely allied with Sheikh Sharif's (ARS-D) and Hassan Dahir Aweys' Asmara (ARS-A) factions immediately occupied the others, promising to maintain security and calling the displaced to return to their homes.

12. (SBU) Summary Cont'd. Militias of the two ARS factions are patrolling separate neighborhoods, but reportedly crossing paths without violence. With one exception in Mogadishu's Karaan district, neither faction has attacked the TFG. On January 13 and 14 residents poured into the streets to celebrate Ethiopia's withdrawal. The TFG and ARS jointly organized a farewell ceremony for ENDF commanders at Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein's office. There is free movement of people and traffic throughout the city. On January 16, approximately 3,000 people assembled for a prayer service in Mogadishu stadium calling for an end to violence. Control in many areas is falling along the same clan lines that existed prior to the Ethiopian presence. All agreed that international support is necessary to "reward" the calm and to maintain Mogadishu's precarious peace. End Summary.

All Celebrate ENDF Withdrawal

13. (SBU) Between January 13 and 14, ENDF completed its withdrawal from Mogadishu. Residents of northern Mogadishu poured into the streets to celebrate an Ethiopian departure that few believed would occur. Although ENDF promised that it would inform the TFG-ARS Joint Security Committee (JSC) of its timetable, early morning on January 13 ENDF forces reportedly vacated some key positions in Huriwaa and Yaqshid neighborhoods in northern Mogadishu unannounced. Also on January 13, Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein "Nur Adde" held a farewell and recognition ceremony for ENDF at his Mogadishu office. The ceremony was jointly organized by the ARS and the TFG and was attended by high-level TFG, ARS, ENDF and AMISOM representatives. Prime Minister Hussein welcomed ENDF withdrawal, terming it an "historical" moment for Somalia and cautioning against Somalia reverting into the path of bloodshed.

14. (SBU) At the ceremony, Hassan Siyaad "Qorgab", ARS representative and Deputy Chairman of the JSC also welcomed ENDF withdrawal from Mogadishu. In an apparent reference to the Djibouti Process, Siyaad said Ethiopia entered Somalia when the country was divided and ENDF is now leaving when it is united. He also expressed appreciation to the international community for its support and urged Somalis to welcome ENDF withdrawal by allowing the forces an honorable and smooth exit. ENDF force commander Gabre Yohannes Abate stated that the Ethiopian government intervened to support the Somali people and will continue to support them. Yohannes stated that ENDF is withdrawing on the basis of the Djibouti Agreement. Finally, the AMISOM Deputy Commander emphasized that there is no more excuse to shed more blood in Somalia now that former President Yusuf resigned and Ethiopian forces are leaving the country.

Mogadishu Calm in Wake
Of ENDF Withdrawal

15. (SBU) With the exception of Digfer Hospital, which the TFG immediately occupied, armed militias identifying themselves as Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) immediately occupied all other positions the ENDF vacated. These UIC militias were generally allied Sheikh Sharif's ARS-D faction or Aweys' ARS-A faction. Contrary to some reports, these militias are not all "anti-government groups." With one exception of a clash between an ARS militia commander and TFG police in Karaan, neither ARS faction has attacked the TFG. The militias have not engaged in any armed confrontation between the various factions.

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16. (SBU) In preparation for the ENDF withdrawal, clan elders, religious leaders, and representatives from both the TFG and the ARS reportedly intensely lobbied the various armed factions in Mogadishu to avoid violence following the ENDF withdrawal. In one example of Mogadishu residents publicly supporting peace, a group Hawiye/Haber Gedir women's leaders met on January 14 to promote the message that with Abdullahi Yusuf and Ethiopia gone, there is no more excuse for fighting. Somali radio call-in radio shows have centered on prospects for violence if and when ENDF left the country. Major media outlets have encouraged peace.

17. (SBU) On January 16, approximately 3,000 people assembled for a prayer service in Mogadishu stadium organized by a group calling itself "Peace and Mediation Clerics." All parties mixed freely and religious elders called for an end to violence. The Islamic Courts Union (ARS-A and ARS-D) are reportedly jointly providing security for the event. (Comment: This cooperation between the ARS factions does not necessarily indicate reconciliation. All our interlocutors told us this arrangement is only temporary, and relations among the groups could rapidly deteriorate in the coming days.)

Public Calls for Reconciliation

18. (SBU) With ENDF withdrawal, alliances in Mogadishu have shifted while groups are attempting to mend fractured relations. Sheikh Abdirahim Isse Adow, the prayer meeting's primary organizer, spoke on behalf of "the Courts," and called for all Somalis to forgive the TFG for its alliance with Ethiopia. Adow was responding to an announcement by the Banadir administration that it would assist all IDPs to return to their homes. In another example of new-found tolerance, Sheikh Yusuf Mohamed Siyad "Indha Adde," a warlord and UIC defense secretary allied to Aweys's ARS-A, addressed Mogadishu residents at the Pasta Factory, a former ENDF stronghold. Sheikh Abdikadir Ali Omar, Sheikh Sharif's deputy under the former UIC and an influential commander of an ARS-D allied militia, publicly addressed the same gathering just minutes later. With ENDF withdrawal, there is little public support for continued violence by al-Shabaab, Ras Kambooni Brigade and other armed extremists in Mogadishu. These groups, made up mostly of non-Hawiye, are perceived as "foreigners" to Hawiye-dominated Mogadishu.

Fighting Could Quickly Resume

¶9. (SBU) Despite this apparent detente, those like Indha Adde are unlikely to remain peaceful for long. Though reportedly unpopular in Mogadishu, Aweys was purportedly seen in the capital, armed with a rifle and dressed in military fatigues. Also calling himself a representative of "the Courts," Indha Adde remains opposed to the TFG, the ARS-D faction, and the Djibouti Process. While some al-Shabaab are surely in Mogadishu, the group is not on the offensive. On January 14, al-Shabaab leader and spokesman Mukhtar Robow announced that with Ethiopian withdrawal, al-Shabaab will turn its guns against AMISOM until it also leaves Somalia.

Control Falling Along Clan Lines

¶10. (SBU) According to our interlocutors in Mogadishu, with the Ethiopians gone, clans are reasserting control over their traditional neighborhoods. Both Qeybdiid and Salat Ali Jelle, TFG Deputy Minister of Defense, explained that militia loyal to ARS-A and ARS-D have positioned themselves in areas previously controlled by their sub-clans under the former UIC. Habr Gedir/Ayr militias under Ethiopian nemesis Indha Adde have re-taken neighborhoods between the Livestock Market and Mogadishu Stadium. Similarly, Habr Gedir/Salaebeaan militias allied to Sheikh Sharif have re-claimed the Wardhigley and northern stretches of Howl Wadaag neighborhoods. A Hawiye/Duduble sub-clan militia, led by Djibouti-based trader and Al-Barakat company chairman Ahmed Nur Ali Jumale, controls Bakara Market and its environs, strengthening his strategic interest in the business sector. Hawiye/Abgal Sheikh Abdirahim Isse Adow, Sheikh Sharif's spokesman, is in southeast Mogadishu's predominantly Abgaal neighborhoods of Karaan and Abdi-Aziz.

¶11. (SBU) According to TFG Police Commissioner Abdi Hassan Awale "Qeybdiid", his and other TFG-allied Abgaal, Morasade and Habr Gedir/Sa'ad militias control a swath of downtown Mogadishu from

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Hodan district to the waterfront neighborhoods of Waberi, Hamar Jab-Jab, Hamar-Weye, Shingani, and Abdi-Aziz, including areas around the presidency and all five AMISOM bases. Qeybdiid told us that the situation remains stable because Hawiye clan elders and clerics have discouraged Indha Adde and his ilk from fomenting violence. But Qeybdiid warned that the situation could change quickly. Abdirahman Dhagahtur, Banadir governor and Mogadishu mayor, lamented to us that AMISOM declined their request to deploy forces to areas vacated by ENDF, citing personnel constraints. He appealed for urgent deployment of additional international troops or other security assistance to maintain the current calm and ensure violence doesn't resume.

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